

Results: Surveys of Policy Makers and Leaders

March 2003



Research Background

- Local agency research needs known early '02.
- *“What do community and public policy leaders think about public park facilities and recreation areas?”*
- Then-pending March ballot and Prop. 40.
- Began with four surveys and added two more.

- Survey questions based on those asked in the DPR Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey, 2003 and 1997.
- Questions consistent with CPRS' VIP program strategies.
- Surveys were brief, fill-in the blank.

- Responses tended to confirm findings from the State Parks Marketing Survey.
 - For example, the appeal of parks and recreation is more emotional rather than rational.

Policy Leaders and the numbers of surveys sent (January-October 2002):

- Surveyed:
 - Legislators (120)
 - Mayors (476)
 - Chairs County Board of Supervisors (58)
 - County Executives (58)
 - School Superintendents (1,043)
 - Chambers of Commerce (411)

Research Response Rates:

<u>Leader Group</u>	<u>Return %</u>
➤ State Legislators	48.3
➤ City Mayors	46.6
➤ County Supervisors	46.6
➤ County Executives	68.9
➤ School Superintendents	69.6
➤ Chamber of Commerce	50.3

Note: Variation in responses among policy makers exist, but generally they agreed as it related to subject areas. Findings have been reported from all six audiences collectively.



Selected Findings:



Key finding with a translation of what it 'really means' to the park and recreation professional will be presented.

#1: Strong agreement among policy leaders that recreation and parks improve the quality of life in their area.

What this really means:

People are emotional about park and recreation programs; picnics, ballgames and other family traditions invoke an emotional, or '*warm and fuzzy*' feeling.

#2: High sense of value for providing safe, wholesome programs and parks for family activities.

#3: Strong agreement that parks and recreation strengthen the community image and create a sense of place and they provide for team sports and youth activities.



What this really means: Parks help to make communities better, stronger more unified. A community without parks is considered less complete.

#4: Overwhelming agreement among policy leaders that parks provide physical, social and emotional development.

#5: Policy leaders agreed recreation facilities help reduce crime and juvenile delinquency.

What this really means:

While the general public sees the positive side of parks for families and youth, there doesn't seem to be a solid connection that parks and recreation can overcome social ills such as juvenile delinquency.

Policy leaders are worried about crime and how to fund community improvements. They also believe:

➤ Park facilities and recreation programs help reduce crime such as truancy, juvenile delinquency and vandalism;

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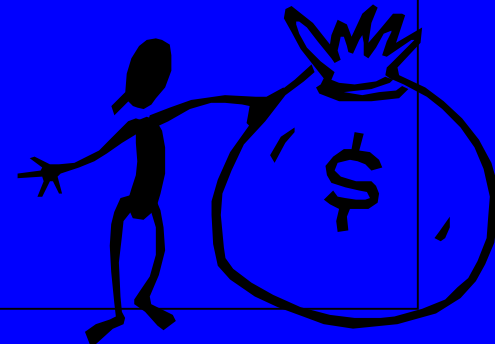
➤ Their willingness to fund park facilities and recreation programs consistently falls well below other community public safety investments (such as police and fire).

#6: Compared to other situational topic areas (such as local economy, traffic, condition of schools - more later) equal number of policy leaders ranked crime, vandalism, and safety high in terms of importance and expressed lesser satisfaction with the current condition of public safety.

What this really means: People are concerned about crime. Although most policy makers know parks are where many families recreate, they also believe parks can attract illicit and unwanted behavior such as truancy, vandalism and juvenile delinquency.

Policy Leaders Rated Local Issues Over the Next Five Years:

- Improving the local economy (91.6)
- The need to replace/upgrade roads, sewer, water services and/or other public infrastructure (91)
- Traffic, noise, clean air/water or similar environmental concern (87.3)
- The need for more and better schools (86.8)
- Crime, vandalism and public safety (86.1)
- **The need for more park and recreation lands, facilities and programs (81)**
- Population growth and urban development (79)
- The loss of agricultural lands and open space (75)



#7: Policy leaders reported moderate satisfaction with availability of parks and recreation programs and only a medium-high level of importance on the need for more park lands and programs.

What this really means:

Leaders are generally satisfied with the availability and condition of parks and appear to be more inclined to focus time and money on other public services.

#8: Leader's neither agreed nor disagreed that parks are too crowded, but a moderate majority believe there are insufficient numbers available.

What this really means:

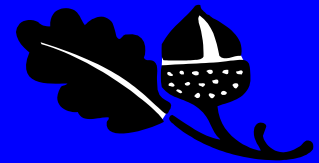
While there is a general sense that parks are crowded and more are needed, there doesn't seem to be any sense of urgency.



#9: Policy leader's placed lesser importance on the need for more park lands and open space than on other given subject areas.

What this *really* means:

Parks, open space and the loss of agricultural lands rate below crime, education and the economy. This may be due to the general sense of satisfaction with current conditions.



#10: Moderate agreement from policy leaders that the availability of parks and programs affects businesses to locate in their community.

#11: Moderate value that park and recreation create jobs and generates income for their communities. However, strong belief parks increase the value of nearby properties.

What this really means: Policy leaders aren't convinced businesses locate in a community because of parks and recreation. Leaders do not seem to fully understand the role parks have in their local economies.

If we want people to invest in parks, we need to convince them that parks are a good investment.

Two publications...

- Concepts: *California Leaders' Opinions of Parks and Recreation*, published 2002 (first four audiences) www.parks.ca.gov/planning
- Concepts: *California School Superintendents and Chambers of Commerce's Opinions of Parks and Recreation* (soon to be published) www.parks.ca.gov/planning